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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDRM](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: OTHER RUSSIA DEMONSTRATIONS CONTINUE TO REVERBERATE

REF: A. MOSCOW 1717  
[1](#)B. ST. PETERSBURG 86

Classified By: Pol M/C Alice G. Wells. Reason: 1.4 (b).

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (C) The April 14 and 15 "Other Russia" demonstrations in Moscow and St. Petersburg (reftels) have been the subject of much commentary by Russian officials and the media. Some in official Russia have admitted that the law enforcement authorities went too far, and in doing so propelled to center stage a movement that would have, if left to its own devices, faded into oblivion. Others in Russia's upper reaches have been unapologetically critical of Other Russia, while the media have arranged themselves across the spectrum. In the wake of this apparent official disarray, there are signs --the court decision to label the National Bolshevik Party extremist and the FSB summons of Other Russia's Garry Kasparov-- that those favoring a tougher line against Other Russia adherents may have the upper hand. Commentators agree that the April 14, 15 events could mark a turning point in the Kremlin's treatment of its most uncompromising opponents. The litmus test, they think, for a Presidential Administration whose wandering eye occasionally still looks West, is the fate of Kasparov who, however marginal he may be in Moscow as a politician, commands media attention outside the country, and cannot be tagged as corrupt, like ex-Prime Minister Kasyanov, or on the fringe, like National Bolshevik Eduard Limonov. End summary.

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Different Politicians, Different Responses  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) In the wake of the occasionally violent dispersal of the April 14 and 15 Other Russia demonstrations in Moscow and St. Petersburg (reftels), most major national politicians have weighed in on the conduct of the police and the behavior of Other Russia (OR). Not unexpectedly, most of those close to the Kremlin have criticized the conduct of the demonstrators. Duma Chairman and pro-Kremlin United Russia Chairman Boris Gryzlov termed the OR protests "provocations" and held that the police had behaved properly. Gryzlov told the media that a Duma working group would be formed to investigate "who paid for the provocations."

[1](#)3. (SBU) Moscow Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov agreed with Gryzlov, and even suggested that OR demonstrators had been bussed in from other cities and paid for their efforts. Gryzlov and Luzhkov were seconded by Duma First Deputy Chairwoman Lyubov Sliska, who called OR "irresponsible" for allegedly using young people to do its dirty work.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Other officials have spoken more carefully in the week following the demonstrations. Human Rights Ombudsman

Vladimir Lukin termed the police response "excessive," and publicly invited complaints from those who had suffered at the hands of law enforcement. "The Constitution clearly says that Russian citizens have the right to peacefully convene and participate in meetings and marches," Lukin noted. Presidential Administration First Deputy Press Secretary Dmitriy Peskov April 17 described the behavior of the police as "excessive," while Presidential Aide for European Union Affairs Sergey Yastrzhembskiy called for an official investigation of their conduct. St. Petersburg Governor Valentina Matviyenko, whose administration banned the first OR march, then licensed the April 15 affair only to see it end violently, asked her administration to pay scrupulous attention to all complaints and, if the facts were confirmed, "take all necessary measures under existing law." Communist Party leader Gennadiy Zyuganov said "the actions of the police and the special forces were entirely inappropriate, and the Prosecutor's Office needs to investigate."

15. (SBU) The media have also chosen sides on the demonstrations, although some newspapers were careful to hedge their bets. Predictably, Channel One, Rossiya, and NTV chose not to cover the demonstrations at all, or paid them glancing attention. The lone exception was Marianna Maksimovskaya's "The Week" news program on REN-TV, which offered a no-holds-barred version of events. In the more heterogeneous world of print media, Novaya Gazeta, predictably, has been most critical of the police response, followed by Kommersant, but Nezavisimaya Gazeta, Novye Izvestiya, and Moskovskiy Komsomolets have also expressed unhappiness with the treatment of OR participants and bystanders. The government's Rossiyskaya Gazeta has been uniformly critical of OR.

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Ryzhkov Rationalizes His Decision to Participate  
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16. (C) In the wake of the demonstrations, Embassy spoke briefly with Duma Deputy Vladimir Ryzhkov who, after denouncing OR earlier in the year, had unexpectedly brought some members of his recently de-registered Russian Republican Party to the April 14 OR event. Ryzhkov glossed over his earlier efforts to distance himself from OR, saying only that he saw nothing contradictory about his participation in the unauthorized meeting and his Duma membership. Since April 14, Ryzhkov has been outspokenly critical of the GOR, calling in the Duma for an investigation of police behavior during the protest, holding Luzhkov "personally responsible" for police brutality, and asserting that "people go to the streets when they cannot find parties of their choice at the polling stations." (In an April 13 meeting with visiting DAS David Kramer, Ryzhkov said nothing about his participation in the OR event. He was worried about the December Duma elections, in which he would not be able to participate unless he found a party able to put him on the list. Ryzhkov said he had conducted on-again, off-again negotiations with SPS, but he was not certain that the party's godfather, Anatoliy Chubais, would allow him onto the SPS party list without a nod from the Kremlin. He thought Kremlin approval was unlikely, as Presidential Administration Deputy Vladislav "Surkov hates me.")

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GOR At A Critical Juncture?  
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17. (C) In an April 19 conversation, the Moscow Carnegie Center's Masha Lipman ascribed the differently-calibrated responses to the weekend's events to disarray driven above all by the fear that someone, somewhere could hold key politicians responsible for the ugly outcome of the demonstrations. Lipman saw the fact that ex-Prime Minister Kasyanov had not been detained, while Kasparov had been as

further evidence of disarray. Lipman joined virtually all commentators here in terming OR a numerically and ideologically marginal group whose importance had only been enhanced by the GOR's disproportionate response. Allowing OR to march, Lipman said, would have been the most effective way of consigning it to oblivion. Now, she suggested the GOR with the April 14, 15 events was at a "turning point," and she termed the treatment of Kasparov key in gauging what its decision would be. (The media report April 20 that the FSB interviewed Kasparov for four hours, but that no concrete questions about extremism were asked.)

18. (C) The outlines of one potential GOR response appeared to be emerging, with some politicians --among them Duma International Affairs Committee Chairman Konstantin Kosachev-- suggesting that there was a link between alleged U.S. government plans to foment democracy in Russia, oligarch-in-exile Boris Berezovskiy's intention to stage a revolution, and the OR street actions. The official Rossiyskaya Gazeta also tried the cabal on for size in a post-demonstration article. Perhaps not coincidentally, the official Rossiya television channel April 15 broadcast a Quebec-made documentary film that used the U.S. government to connect the dots of the "color revolutions" in Serbia, Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan. The film was allegedly edited and creatively translated in order to make it more provocative than the original.

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Comment  
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19. (C) Events scheduled over the next week or so will force the GOR to show its hand. Moscow Helsinki Group and "For Human Rights" plan a meeting of solidarity with OR on April 26 in Moscow, while OR plans to attempt a second meeting in Nizhniy Novgorod on April 28. It seems at this juncture that a decision by the GOR to back off its forceful response to earlier demonstrations, however, would only further embolden OR, and it may be that eventuality that will be decisive in determining what course the authorities will take.  
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